

Machiavelli's Influence on the Islamic World

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Abstract: People come and go over the course of time, but some have made such a long lasting contribution to the modern society as Machiavelli. Machiavelli, a diplomat, philosopher and politician during the Renaissance, is a controversial figure over time. In spite of his unkindness showed in his thoughts, scholars and politicians around the globe acquire some insights from him. From his book, *The Prince*, we can find out his idea of power and the influence of some Islamic thinkers, and if we look at some contemporary Islamic thinkers' work, we can tell Machiavelli's influence as well.

Keywords: the Renaissance, Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Islamic thinkers

1. Introduction

Long after its fall, the Roman empire inspired European theologians, philosophers, and rulers, who dreamed of a centralized political structure embracing all of Christian Europe. Europe faced a new era; the heaven of theologians, the rebirth of philosophers and the chance for rulers to reconstruct, the Renaissance, an event that sharpened the modern society, took place. At this period, People started to rediscover the works of ancient Greece and Rome. Here came to the figure this passage mainly discuss, Machiavelli, a diplomat, philosopher and politician. To evaluate Machiavelli's role in history, this paper will first analyze the society and cultures during the Renaissance, and then compare and contrast Machiavelli's philosophy to that of Islamic thinkers with the emphasis of Machiavelli's life, and to reveal a real Machiavelli, who exerted influence on the Islamic world due to the culture tolerance in the Islamic world and who was also nourished by Islamic thoughts.

2. The Society During the Renaissance

Society during the Renaissance was cosmopolitan and tolerant. Before the start of the Renaissance, there was an array of crisis. One of the most influential, fatal crisis is the Black Death, a bubonic plague pandemic that occurred in Afro-Eurasia from 1346 to 1353, and such pandemic is the deadliest disease recorded in human history, which caused the death of 75–200 million people. This pandemic destroyed the society. Decades later, the gradual recovery of the society — the demographic recovery and the reconstruction of power — collided with the Renaissance, a remarkable cultural flowering, named by the French word that means “rebirth”. Such a name demonstrates a round of artistic and intellectual creativity that took place from the 14th to the 16th century. From artistic perspective, architects, painters and sculptors, did not set their medieval predecessors as examples; instead, they found their inspiration from classical Greek and Roman artist, artists at that period sought for the sense of realistic and the expression of beauty. Similar to arts, Contemporary scholars

was shaped by ancient Roman and Greek work. Scholars at that period invented a term “humanist” means the study of the nature, literature, history and moral philosophy. And they named themselves humanist thinker. These humanist thinkers voiced up the meaning of life, appreciated the nature and some somehow had worship to the ancient gods and the spirits of nature. They were not controlled by the church even though a great number of them were trained and studied under instructors who had close relationship to the church. In short, human beings evolved significantly during the Renaissance.

The Islamic world also reborn during the 14th to 16th century. Like its counterpart in Europe, the Islamic world were also affected by the Black Death, and Muslims shifted from the migrating live to the sedentary live after the death of Timur, a Turco-Mongol conqueror who founded the Timurid Empire in and around the modern-day Middle East. As Muslims changed their life, Islam spread further, and the so-called Islamic world got bigger and bigger. With the spread of Islam, Muslims faced serious cultural tolerance they had ever faced before. For instance, Persians who were greatly influenced by Greeks exerted a great influence on the Islamic world. Greek tradition was way more opaque to the early Muslims than the Persian as they had long been Christian. However, Persians’ role in Islamic culture was nonetheless considered to be marginal when it came to the effect of Arabs. The Arabs only succeeded in conquering the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire and this assure the existence of Christianity throughout the ares around the Mediterranean sea [4].

2.1. Machiavelli And His Political Thought

Niccolò Machiavelli was born in family with reputation in 1469. His father was a lawyer. Like other humanists, young Machiavelli had an extensive formal education and was planted with the idea of Christianity by his wealthy father. With the emphasis of the formal education, Machiavelli’s’ brilliance and his family reputation, he was offered as the secretary for the city of Florence. However, soon after, the Medici family who had ruled the Republic of Florence for over 60 years, namely the uncrowned king, and who had been exploded politically and expelled by the council retuned to the throne. Machiavelli’s and his family, however, were against toward the Medici family. Consequently, Machiavelli himself was expelled, suffering decades of political instability and turmoil. Over just a few decades, Machiavelli experienced a series of carrier reversals—— he went from being an important diplomat to a semi-successful general, to an enemy of the state - tortured and then exiled when the Medici returned to power.

What makes Machiavelli, the controversial thinker and politician famous is not his contribution to the Florentine Republic but his idea that it is moral for politicians acquire what they want no matter what the cost is. To be more specific, in his view, a good politician is not supposed to be honest or friendly; what he believes is that it is reasonable to be dark sometimes as long as politicians have brought honor to his or her state. Simply put, being nice may well be a virtue in general, but that is not what citizens seek for, and what people truly want is effectiveness, which sometimes makes people play dirty. Machiavelli’s view, apparently, is so different and unacceptable to what modern people believe, and even other contemporary politicians or scholars could not see eye to eye with him on this view. In multiple occasions, people argue whether he was a humanist or not. Indeed, rarely can people find the appreciation of life and nature from his idea. Even so, he still should be considered as a humanist for the greater good.

Even though Machiavelli’s thoughts were not accepted by the church, he was indeed a humanist. To illustrate, all of his books were prohibited, including his most famous master piece *The Prince, a discourse on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius, Florentine Histories, the Art of War*. This book, *The Prince* can be regarded as a specimen in the genre of the mirror of princes, and its purpose is to guide princes how to run a nation. Because of the influence of his humanistic mode of education, Machiavelli believed in realism, and such idea stands for the politic concept that a leader should take

his bearings from what people do rather than what he preaches. He later invented the Italian word “virtu”, and Virtu does not equal to virtue in Italian. To illustrate, he gave this virtu(virtue) a new meaning, that is, how a ruler can gain what he wants, and sometimes, it might be cruel. When someone is about to make a decision, Machiavelli would recommend the individual to make a decision tree, listing all the causes and effects, keeping people from getting overwhelmed due to some moral issues and to make the right call which helps them achieve the goal. In a nutshell, Machiavelli’s understanding is far beyond the average, and his philosophy should make him a humanist.

2.2. Machiavelli and the Islamic World

The Islamic political tradition fed Machiavelli, and meanwhile the latter also fed the former. Many scholars have speculated the relation between Machiavelli and the Islamic world with the emphasis on political thoughts. However, answers to this question varied. To illustrate, it is true that Muslims, typically, did not have the sense of a nation for a long period of time— they would rather believe that they served to the ruler, himself. In Muslims’ scenario, it is to serve the caliph, the absolute monarchy(both the head of the government and the head of the religion). Even so, there were some notable Islamic philosophers, who were considered as precursor of Machiavelli. For instance, Ibn Zafar al-Şiqillī was one of the Islamic thinker who was considered to be a Precursor of Machiavelli. He also discussed the relationship between leadership and power. In his idea powers should be kept forever no matter the cost, and rulers should always fight anything for the win. Such an idea of power and the leadership is similar to what Machiavelli stated in *the Prince* [3].

On the other hand, Machiavelli also exerted influenced on the Islamic world. Due to the spread of Islam, and the change of the Muslims society mentioned in the paper, the Islamic world became much more diverse and willing to embrace different ideas and beliefs. For example, the area where is modern-day Grace turned from Eastern Orthodox into Islamic. The traditions, manners and cultures, as a result, were taken and reformed inside the Muslims’ society. In addition, the rulers in the Islamic world, say the ruler of the Abbasid Empire, Ottoman Empire and Mughal Empire, were friendly and willing to embrace differences. And this provided the opportunity for the spread of Machiavelli’s political thoughts. For example, Machiavelli’s book, *The Prince* was first translated into Persian and later in Arabic. Arabic and other Muslim thinkers really were facilitated by Machiavelli’s political thoughts of Machiavelli really facilitated Islamic thinkers. Take Kitāb sirr al-asrār as an example. He drew his inspiration from *The Prince*. And Kitāb sirr al-asrār’s work helped the diffusion of Machiavelli’s idea in the India, Ottoman Turkish and Perisa.

3. Conclusion

In summary, Niccolò Machiavelli, the 15th century diplomat, philosopher and politician is a controversial figure throughout the history, but if we take his idea(a ruler should be concerned not just with his or her fame and reputation, but also be always willing to act unscrupulously at the right time) for a second thought, he should be considered as a humanist. Moreover,

Machiavelli influenced by Islamic thinkers and he also became an important influence in the Islamic world as the spread of the Islam as well as the embrace of different cultures collided.

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